769 As a substitute for the chicken, it is very common to
782 offer some dege, a bit of millet coarsely ground and thrown in a little water. The fa keeps this liquid in a small gourd. It is perhaps [182] reasonable to think that this is the most ancient manner of honoring the dead and, in particular, calling for their protection in obtaining the two essentials of life: grain and water.

[273] An equally common libation is made with dlo, a kind of millet beer which every Bambara enjoys drinking to the point of intoxication. The dead could hardly fail to be pleased with an offering of what they had enjoyed so much on earth!

[276] One must conclude, too, that offerings of kola nuts please the dead because it gives them a chance to enjoy a favorite treat. The officiator chews the kola nut and then spits out his saliva mixed with the juice and remains along the walls of the blon',

Such are the ordinary offerings, but on special occasions the quantity and importance of the gifts are increased according to the desired results. When many people are present and the house is prosperous, the victims are oxen and sheep. It should [781] not be forgotten that the flesh of these consecrated victims, eaten in common, makes a very strong mystical bond between the participants; it is a true communion. It is generally conceded that the bond created by drinking consecrated liquids together is much less strong.

776 In addition to his ancestors, every Bambara has as his
778 special protector, one of those gods (nyana) which are created wholly by the work of the magician. Every family has one or more nyana, whose priest is the fa. The boli, the symbol and altar of this type of divinity, is usually hidden from the uninitiated; it is put into a leather or canvas sack, a gourd, or a pot. The nyana of Sounsan, the ancestor of the Massa-si, was a n-ko whose boli was kept in a monkey skin. The boli is taken out of its cover so that libations can be poured over it and animal remains smeared on it. If there is some objection to exposing it, the offering is put on the cover.

769 Everything that takes place relative to the cult of the
794 nyana is analogous to that described for the cult of the ancestors.

Chapter 6

Worship, Celebrations, Saraka, Sacrifices, and Dances in Honor of the Gnéna

1. The First Two Groups of Gnéna

781 The fundamental bases of all Bambara devotions are first, and
776 above all, fear and secondly, the desire to have everything without effort or work. The Bambara respect a strong, powerful being because it can punish and reward, and since their fetishes are not equal in power, they take care not to honor all equally.

776 The genii of the first two groups have no priest or official minister, and public, solemn sacrifices are offered them very rarely.
782 In the dry season, however, some festivals are held in their honor.
852 The chief participants are children, who on these days stuff themselves with /millet/ flour mixed with honey water and milk, and with sorghum cakes. When they are full they take the leftovers outside the village to a place where paths cross, and many hens, dogs, and other animals come for the booty. The poor and unfortunate also come, for
[735] they, too, may take their share; every saraka (1) belongs to them.

1. Tax, tribute, alms.

776 Little girls and boys take part in these festivals, but there is a
852 special one for unexcised girls, and those who are soon to be excised and are getting ready for this great event in Bambara life bear /106/ all the expenses. It is the celebration of soli basi k'li (1), of which I will speak at greater length in my chapter on circumcision.

1. Soli, "young girls who will soon be excised"; basi, a kind of couscous with very small grains which distantly resembles semolina; k'li, "obtained by singing and clapping hands."

776 It rarely leaves its tree; it likes its little grove and shady park, and
778 in many places it is satisfied with a stump that is all blackened, worm eaten, rotten, and falling to pieces.

The formula of the sacrifice

782 When one is present at a sacrifice to the dasiri and sees the
781 gnéna-n-sonnaba uncover his head, take off his large blouse, and crouch at the feet of the fetish, one expects something imposing and grand. Nothing of the sort occurs, and one is quite surprised to find so little gravity /120/ in such an important act. People enjoy themselves and chat; the priest, red with blood, tosses off witticisms and coarse jokes, and while feet and wings of the victims -- goats, sheep, and hens -- twitch in the agonies of death, nothing passes from one group to another but bursts of laughter that finally disappear far off at the edge of the grove where the women are.

782 The words in the sacrificial formula vary a little from one village to another, all depending on the volubility of the sacrificer. Nevertheless, it remains basically the same everywhere. After having greeted the fetish in his own name and the name of his subjects, he implores it to forgive them all the insults, offenses, and disrespect toward it, of which they have been guilty, voluntarily or involuntarily, during the entire year. He then calls it by a name related to the type of tree in which it is located -- e.g., ma ziraba ("great baobab man"), ma djala ba ("great false-cedar man"), -- and announces that he is going to sacrifice. While offering the dégé and d'lo, he implores it to protect them against the evils of the sons of the fetish siri, the souba (1), to preserve them from the souya maou (2), the

[754]

1. Sou, "night"; ba, "great." The souba are masters of the night who change themselves into hyenas or owls, dig up corpses, and eat human flesh.

2. Souyaké, "to prowl at night."